



The Trip's *Macbeth*

By Jeff Smith, March 18, 2014 / *San Diego Reader*

I don't like reviewing a show after it closed. If I enjoyed it, people ask why didn't I review it sooner; if not, why hurl barbs after the fact?

I'm also wary of promos that claim, "*Macbeth* like you've never seen before!" Oboy. Red flag arising. I've seen enough "concept" *Macbeths* to steer far clear — i.e. a Kabuki version that "unsexed" the tragedy into a softly chanted blur.

For these reasons I give new companies a wait and hear approach. Instead of barging in on opening night, I wait for reports from trusted sources. Not raves or pans — these can vary — but rather is there something there? Is something going on?

An email Sunday morning blared: "The Trip's *Macbeth*. Closes tonight. Go."

I went and Whoa!

When Macbeth learns that “the Queen, my lord, is dead,” he launches into one of the most memorized speeches in Shakespeare (“She should have died hereafter...Out out brief candle...a tale told by an idiot...” etc.). Or should.

The Trip’s *Macbeth* is a she: Claire Kaplan. The news doesn’t faze her. So messengers say the same thing different ways: the Queen has passed away, is no longer among us, kicked the bucket. Kaplan’s still mum. So Thomas Miller, painted green, breaks character. Claire can’t remember the cue or the line, he says; she’s like that. So Miller goes back in character — as a tree/soldier from Burnham Wood recently arrived at Dunsinnane — and improvises a speech.

This is Macbeth through the Looking Glass. You often saw the opposite of what you expect. In one scene, the Macbeths jogged. When Malcolm flees, he says, “No f-ing way I’m staying here. See you in England!” Another scene’s Fat Tuesday at Mardi Gras.

In a soliloquy, instead of sticking to the text, Kaplan/Macbeth does a face-to-face with the audience. S/he tells a shaggy dog story about trying to find the Witch: through the lowlands stinking of cow dung, up a twisty road to a sports bar where everyone was drinking beer and watching football. And how she waited, patiently, until finally, guess who?

Maybe most striking: in the original, Macbeth kills King Duncan off-stage. Here, a big black curtain rises and we watch the murder in

violent slow-motion; the royal blood spurting from his neck: purple tinsel.

The 75-minute show was irrepressibly irreverent. In contrast to the black plastic-covered walls, the floor was strewn with balloons of various colors. These bounced on cue and, in the end, popped like firecrackers.

But as with the murder of Duncan, the piece hit unexpectedly deep notes as well. Director Tom Dugdale — REMEMBER THE NAME — narrated, sometimes seriously, others as a lounge act MC. He said the cast would bring the play down to earth (to prove his point he broke with superstition and called *Macbeth* by name). Irreverence ruled — the surface. But there was an obvious reverence as well.

The five person cast didn't just toy with a masterpiece: a la Shakespeare for People Who Hate Shakespeare (or people who haven't a clue and try to make up cool stuff). With impressive precision, including lights and sounds, they remixed the text, took from here and there, and shed new, sometimes blazing light on the Scottish Play — er, a demythologized *Macbeth*.